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Editor:
John Berraclough
Writer:
Alan Murdoch
Designer:
Steve O'Leary
Art Assistance:
Richard Vaughn
Editorial Consultant:
Alan McKenzie



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THE SERIALS—PART

The twenty years between 1930 and 1949 were vintage years for fantasy. The bleakness of the economic depression of the early thirties had fostered an interest in the fantastic. Via the pulp magazine, such characters as the Shadow and Doc Savage had become household names. Then, in the 1940s the rise of the comic book gave us such hits as Superman and Captain America.

Coincidentally, it was those same twenty years during which the movie serial or chapterplay enjoyed its greatest popularity. Drawing initially upon the pulp magazines, then upon the comics, for inspiration, the serials introduced awe-struck audiences to the fascinations of Flash Gordon, Batman and Buck Rogers.

Despite a promising start with *Metropolis* (1925) and *Things to Come* (1936) the feature films spent most of the thirties and forties concentrating on Gothic Horror. It was left to the chapterplays to put science fiction and sf heroes on film.

The format for most of the 230 or so sound serials that were produced between 1929 and 1956 was straightforward, sometimes painfully so. The first episode was for getting all the boring stuff out of the way. We were introduced to the goodies, the baddies, we found out what it was the baddies wanted — usually some kind of deathray or other secret weapon with which to rule the world. We were introduced to the hero's sweetheart, often the daughter of the kindly, well-meaning scientist who had invented the deathray in the first place (though how anyone can invent a deathray with good intentions is beyond me!).

For the rest of the chapterplay (usually another 11 episodes, though some bigger productions ran a total of fifteen parts) we followed the exploits of the hero as he sought to recover the stolen deathray, rescue his sweetheart (invariably kidnapped by the villain), rescue his sidekick (invariably knocked unconscious by the villain's henchmen) and more importantly rescue himself.



Each chapter ended with the hero or some one dear to him helpless in some inescapable trap. In the earliest serials, heroes and heroines were often left at the end of a chapter clinging to the edge of a precipice by their fingertips, hence the serials' nickname, *Cliffhangers*.

The key word in the chapterplays was ACTION. Not for the serials the mundanities of a comprehensible plot. In the serials no hero was even seen with his feet less than a yard apart, no sidekick was merely shot when he could be fed into the jaws of such terrifying devices as "decapitators" and "mutilators". No villain ever called himself Bill or George when he could conceal his identity behind a black mask and a menacing name like The Scorpion or The Black Claw.



Above left: *Adie Ince* in the grip of a parrot-faced robot in *The Vanishing Shadow* (1934). Above right: *Vanishing Shadow* hero *Stanley Stanfield* (Onslow Stephens) is roughed up by the bad guys as sweetheart *Gloria*

ONE, THE EARLY DAYS



(Ada Ince) looks helplessly on.
Above: Hero Gene Autry finds himself in the thick of the brutalities when a revolt breaks out in *The Phantom Empire* (1935).

Nothing was allowed to slow the juggernaut pace of the serials with the occasional exception of talking (character development) scenes and — perish forbid — "smoochy" (romantic) scenes, both of which brought hoots of derision from the youthful audiences.

The earliest of the science fiction serials was *The Vanishing Shadow* (Universal, 1934). Setting the style for the chapterplays that would follow, *The Vanishing Shadow* contains all the necessary formula devices to ensure maximum thrills. The story concerned the efforts of Stanley Stanfield (played with gusto by Onslow Stevens who would later turn up in Universal's *House of Dracula*, who seeks revenge against a group of villains that was responsible for his father's death

via a ruthless smear campaign. With the help of the scientist, Professor Carl Van Dorn, he constructs an arsenal of super-scientific devices with which to battle the baddies and extract his revenge against their leader, Ward Barnett (Walter Miller). Barnett tries to frame our hero with the murder of a gangster. But Stanfield retaliates with various incredible gadgets including a disintegration ray, a vanishing belt and a parrot faced robot. However, in a novel twist, it turns out that Barnett is the father of Gloria, Stanley Stanfield's sweetheart. The hero is torn between his need to avenge his father and the love he feels for Gloria. Eventually the forces of law and love win out when Barnett is killed trying to escape from justice and Stanley and Gloria live happily ever after.

The Vanishing Shadow was directed by Universal contract director Louis Friedlander, better known to film fans as Lew Landers, the director of the Boris Karloff/Bela Lugosi picture *The Raven* (1935).

The next entry into the sf serial stakes was a convoluted jungle tale called *The Lost City* (Krellberg, 1935). The serial was carried along more by virtue of its enthusiasm rather than by its skill, despite the presence of such distinguished professionals as William "Stage" Boyd and Kane Richmond in the cast. The direction of Harry Revier was ham-fisted, to say the least, and the script contained some real howlers. In fact, the chapterplay was so bad that when a New York television station tried to broadcast the 12 episode serial during the 1950s, their switchboard was jammed with complaints. The viewers of New York never did get to see episode two.

To encapsulate the meandering storyline in the space available would be nigh impossible. But basically, the story tells of the adventures of an electrical engineer, Bruce Gordon (Kane Richmond), who travels to the depths of darkest Africa to



investigate the cause of a spate of electrical storms that are plaguing the entire globe. With his faithful companion Jerry (Eddie Fetherstone) in tow, Gordon travels to a remote trading post run by a character called Butterfield (Gabby Hayes). Setting up a network of impressive-looking electronic equipment, Gordon attempts to trace the source of the electromagnetic disturbances and discovers to his amazement (but not the audience's) that the electrical storms are emanating from nearby Magnetic Mountain. And deep inside the Magnetic Mountain is a city ruled by a scientific genius called Zolok who plans to (surprise!) conquer the world. Using his own form of tv surveillance Zolok is watching Bruce Gordon's every move. Also watching Gordon's every move is Dr Manyus (Josef Swickart), the captive scientist responsible for Zolok's technological wonders (though why a "scientific wizard" like Zolok needs a scientist to build his knick-knacks is never made clear). Needless to say, Manyus is being held against his will and only continues to build the super-weapons for Zolok because his daughter (surprise again!) Natcha (Claudia Dell) is being held captive by Zolok.

As well as attempting to conquer the world with electrical storms Zolok has more tangible help in the form of a horde of seven-foot, simple-minded natives, created by another of Manyus' devices, a ray which destroys brains and enlarges bodies.

Zolok decides he must lure Gordon and his companions into the underground city and forces the lovely Natcha to scream into a microphone which causes said shriek to reverberate around the jungle. Gordon and Jerry are immediately alerted to the fact that all is not well. "That sounds like a white woman's scream!" declares Jerry with a perfectly straight face. Bruce Gordon and Jerry dash from their hut and plummet through a trap door, down a chute and smack into the middle of Zolok's city. From here on the plot becomes totally incomprehensible, peppered with treachery, scientific impossibilities and appalling contemporary prejudices. For example one scene has Dr Manyus and Bruce Gordon arrive at a native village of white pygmies. Manyus explains that

these people were once black pygmies but had been turned white by one of Manyus' amazing formulae. Whereupon a black native pleads with Manyus to be turned white. Manyus magnanimously agrees and performs the operation. "Doc, you're a genius," declares Jerry. "Science can accomplish anything," protests Manyus modestly. "This is the greatest scientific discovery yet," counters Bruce.

Needless to say, by the end of the twelve chapters, Zolok and his lost city have been destroyed and our heroes have emerged victorious.

Better on every level was *The Phantom Empire* (Mascot, 1935) which introduced Gene Autry, the singing cowboy, to the masses. The 12-episode serial was directed by Otto Brewer and B. Reeves Eason. Our hero Gene (Gene Autry) runs a dude ranch, beneath which lies a huge natural deposit of radium. A gang of crooks find out about the radium and begin to devise ways to force Gene to sell out. Aided by his friends Frankie (Frankie Darro) and Betsy (Betsy King Ross), Gene fights back, causing the criminals to turn tail. The three companions give chase and are astounded when the

crooks stumble upon the entrance to Murania — a futuristic city which lies several miles beneath the ground. Gene pursues the baddies into the city and is captured by Queen Tika (Dorothy Christie) and her rebellious prime minister, Argo (Wheeler Oakman). Worried for their friend, Frankie and Betsy follow, but are also captured by the Muranians. Before long another of Gene's friends, Oscar (Lester "Smiley" Burnette) attempts a rescue, but he too is captured. Things don't look good for Gene and his chums. Fortunately, a revolt breaks out in the subterranean city and in the confusion Gene, Betsy, Frankie and Oscar escape. Just as they reach the surface the Muranians unleash a mysterious death ray which destroys the Phantom Empire.

Perhaps the best-known and best loved of all serials is the 13 episode, Universal offering, *Flash Gordon* (1936). Universal were typically economic from the outset. But even with the utilisation of leftover sets from *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) the budget still topped the 350,000 dollar mark — about twice the cost of the later *Flash Gordon's Trip to Mars* (1938).

The story of *Flash Gordon* adhered closely to the first year of the comic strip by Alex Raymond. Beginning on January 7th 1934 Raymond's *Flash Gordon* set the character in an exotic world where everything was larger than life — often literally so.

The planet Mongo is discovered to be on a direct collision course with Earth. At the same time the proximity of the alien world seems to be causing severe atmospheric disturbances on Earth. A plane carrying Flash Gordon and Dale Arden is caught in one of these violent disturbances. The plane out of control, Flash and Dale parachute to safety, only to land near the laboratory of the brilliant Doctor Alexis Zarkov (Frank Shannon). Zarkov has built a rocket ship with which he plans to reach Mongo in a desperate attempt to forestall the impending collision. Flash and Dale decide to accompany Zarkov and the three blast off for the unknown. Almost immediately upon landing, Flash, Dale and Zarkov are captured by the soldiers of the ruler of Mongo, Ming, and are dragged before the emperor. Zarkov points out to Ming that if Mongo and Earth are to collide then not only will Earth perish, but so will Mongo. ►



Opposite top: Gene's chums, Frankie (Frankie Darro) and Betsy (Betsy King Ross) unconscious and at the mercy of the Muranians in *The Phantom Empire* (1935). Opposite centre: Hero Gene makes a few experimental adjustments to a robot before being bopped on the head by an irate Muranian in *The Phantom Empire*. Opposite below: *Flash Gordon's Trip To Mars* introduced a new character, Happy (Donald Kerr, behind Flash). Above: A scene from *Flash Gordon*, featuring Buster Crabbe in the starring role.



Impressed by this piece of flawless logic, Ming decides that he may find a use for a theorist of Zarkov's calibre. Impressed also by Dale's not inconsiderable beauty Ming decides that he may find a use for her too. Unfortunately Flash isn't to be that lucky and Ming orders him thrown to the monkey-men.

However, help is at hand in the form of the Princess Aura, daughter of Ming, who feels that Flash deserves better than the monkey-men and offers herself in their place. Blasting away at Ming's soldiers and monkey-men alike, Flash and Aura suddenly feel the ground disappear beneath them as they tumble into a pit of hideous reptiles. Escaping through a secret passageway Flash and Aura are catapulted into a nightmare world peopled by Lion Men, Shark Men, Hawk Men, Tigrons and Gockos. Ultimately teaming up with the Lion Men, Flash defeats the forces of Ming and sets the rightful ruler of Mongo upon the throne.

Similar in style to Flash Gordon was *The Undersea Kingdom* (1936), a 12 episode Republic serial. Directed by B. Reeves Eason (who had a hand in *Phantom Empire* the year before) and Joseph Kane the story concerned a civil war which raged in the Lost Continent of Atlantis far beneath the ocean waves. The White Robes, the followers of Sharad the high priest of true Atlanteans, are

defending their land against the Black Robes, the minions of Unga Khan who has harnessed the atom and is prepared to use it to rule Atlantis. At the same time Unga Khan has his atomic powered disintegrating cannon at North America as part of his bid to conquer the land surface of the globe.

Meanwhile, in America, the brilliant scientist Professor Norton (C. Montague Shaw) announces that he believes the earthquakes to be emanating from a human source, probably the lost continent of Atlantis. He plans to use his invention, an earthquake countering ray and a rocket powered submarine, to get to the heart of the matter and stop the earthquakes at their source. Accompanying the Professor are Crash Corrigan (Ray "Crash" Corrigan, who later turned up as the monster in *It, the Terror from Beyond Space*, a film which heavily influenced *Alien*), Diana Compton (Lois Wilde), the professor's son Billy and two sailors, Briny and Salty.

Needless to say, Unga Khan is aware of their every move and dispatches four of his volkite robots to meet the party as they arrive on the doorstep of Atlantis.

From there on Crash and his friends become enmeshed in the Black Robe/White Robe civil war, finally defeating the armies of the evil Unga Khan and bringing peace

to the world again.

It's interesting to note that Lon Chaney Jr, who later went on to become a star at Universal with the 1941 movie *The Wolf Man*, appeared in the *Undersea Kingdom* as Hakur, leader of Unga Khan's armies.

Flash Gordon returned to delight the serial fans in 1938, via the Ford Beebe and Robert Hill directed 15 episode chapterplay *Flash Gordon's Trip to Mars*. The serial used much footage from the first Flash Gordon offering and lifted chunks of the 1930 movie *Just Imagine*. The audiences were a little confused by the change in Dale Arden's hair colour and the addition of a comic relief character, Happy (Donald Kerr). The action this time round centred on Mars rather than on Mongo, with Ming (Charles Middleton, again) stealing nitrogen from the Earth's atmosphere. Just what Ming planned to do with all that nitrogen was never revealed. Before the final scene, Flash has convinced the martians to dismiss Ming, stop stealing Earth's nitrogen and become law abiding citizens of the galaxy once more. As for Ming, he meets a grisly end (we presume) in a handy disintegration chamber.

Overall, *Flash Gordon's Trip to Mars* is a more accomplished chapterplay than its predecessor. The dialogue is tighter and more realistic and the story is a little less



complicated.

With two successful Flash Gordon serials under their belts, Universal began to look around for another likely space hero to spearhead another line of serials. Buck Rogers was the obvious choice and, taking no chances, Universal cast Buster Crabbe in the lead, with Constance Moore as his lovely companion, Wilma Deering.

The premise has Buck Rogers frozen in suspended animation for five hundred years until he is awoken in the twenty fifth century. He discovers that the world is ruled by a character called Killer Kane and his gang of cutthroats. Buck manages to enlist the aid of the Saturnians in the fight against Kane's tyranny and finally defeats Kane's forces in a spectacular air battle.

But Buck Rogers wasn't as big a hit with the audiences as Universal had hoped. And so they decided to give Flash Gordon another try. Flash Gordon Conquers the Universe appeared in 1940 with most of the original cast in fact with the exception of Dale, who was portrayed this time out by Carol Hughes.

Ming, in his never-ending quest to rule the Universe decides to unleash the dreaded plague of the Purple Death upon a hapless Earth. Flash, Dale and Zarkov set off to discover the cause of the terrible epidemic and are hardly surprised



Above: Buster Crabbe crashes into action in *Buck Rogers* (1939). Right: Ming's henchmen hold Flash captive as Dale pleads for his life in *Flash Gordon* (1936). Far right: The leader of the Black Robes, Khan (Monte Blue), watches as Ditar (Booth Howard) gets the better of Crash Corigan (disguised as Hakur) while a White Robe prepares to bash some one on the noggin with a club. Below right: Buster Crabbe gives a good account of himself in *Flash Gordon*.

when they find their old enemy Ming behind the plot. Enlisting the aid of Prince Barin and Princess Aura (Ming's daughter) they manage to put a stop to Ming's bid and destroy the evil emperor by launching a rocket at him. Apart

from interesting scenes in the Ice Kingdom of Mongo, Frigia, the serial had little to recommend it. The audiences seemed to agree and Flash Gordon Conquers the Universe marked the end of the Flash Gordon serials. ●

THE SERIALS—PART IV

With the onset of the 1940s the serials took another direction. In 1938, a new hero had crashed onto the scene. In doing so he bolstered up what was then a dying industry and became a legend, spawning countless imitators. The hero was Superman.

Though the tradition of the "super" hero had been established as early as 1931 in the pulp magazines of the day — The Shadow, with his black cloak and slouch hat being the most obvious example — it took Superman to draw on the best elements of the hero and the science fiction pulps, transfer the whole mess into the more immediate story-telling medium of the comic book and revitalise the entire comic book industry, which until that time had relied mainly upon reprinting newspaper strips for its material.

The sources for Superman have been fairly well-documented. It is sufficient to point out that the character was heavily influenced by Street and Smith's Doc Savage. The major difference was that while Doc Savage was a human marvel, his senses and athletic abilities honed to a razor sharp edge, Superman's powers derived from his alien-ness. Born on the planet Krypton, the baby Superman had been sent to Earth by his parents who perished along with their planet. The young Superman had powers beyond the comprehension of any mortal. He was "able to leap tall buildings at a single bound"; he was "more powerful than a locomotive" and "faster than a speeding bullet". Nowadays, of course, Superman's powers have been amplified by the adolescent zeal of his writers who have boosted his abilities to make him able to leap tall galaxies at a single bound, more powerful than the motion of a planet and faster than a speeding light ray!

It was the superheroes that gave the serials a new lease of life during the war-torn years of the 1940s.

Several of the pulp characters enjoyed brief reigns as serial stars. The first of these was the Spider in 1938. The serial, *The Spider's Web*, was filmed by Columbia

under the direction of Ray Taylor and James W. Horne. Evidently, the film-makers decided that the original appearance of the Spider as described in the pulps was too horrific for their audiences. The pulp Spider was wont to dress up in grotesque makeup and appear to his enemies as a demented hunchbacked dwarf, who would think little of taking the law into his own hands and executing a villain himself. The serial version was more clean-cut and fought for truth, justice and the American Way. Whether the changes made by Columbia were for the better it is difficult to say. The very elements that had made the Spider a huge hit with the readers of the pulp magazines had been stripped ruthlessly away in a bid to clean up the character for mass consumption. From a purist's point of view this was sacrilege of the highest order. But the move must have been approved by the serial fans as the character went on to make another appearance, in *The Spider Returns* (1941).

The story of *The Spider's Web* concerns the efforts of noted criminologist Richard Wentworth (Warren Hull) to defeat the master criminal The Octopus, and put an end to his bid to reduce the transport systems of the United States to total chaos (I have American friends who insist the Spider failed!). The Spider uses a disguise carried over from the pulps to aid him in his battle. Posing as the underworld figure Blinky McQuade, The Spider is able to infiltrate gangdom and uncover useful information about his opponent. The 15 episode cliff-hanger is actually a whodunnit. The Octopus is known to be one of the characters introduced early in the serial. Which one? Oh, come on...

Similar in style to the heroes of the pulp magazines, though actually a new hero, was Copperhead, the good guy in the 1940 chapterplay, *The Mysterious Doctor Satan*. Copperhead (Robert Wilcox) wears a copper chain mail mask to conceal his identity while he battles the evil plans of the serial's title character, The Mysterious Doctor Satan.



NO, THE SUPERHEROES



Above: The cast of *The Spider's Web* (1938). *The Spider*/Richard Wentworth (Warren Hull), Nita Van Sloan (Iris Meredith), Jackson (Richard Fiske) and Wentworth's faithful Hindu servant Ram Singh (Kenneth Duncan). Left: A portrait of the Spider. Below: The bad guys get the drop on Copperhead/Bob Wayne (Robert Wilcox) in *The Mysterious Doctor Satan* (1940).



Bob Wayne had been given the mask by his father, who had fought against corrupt justice in the old west, concealing his face behind the mask. Bob dons the mask to save society from the machinations of Doctor Satan (Edward G. Robinson) and at the same time clear the name of the hero created by his father all those years ago. Doctor Satan aims to build a robot with which he can (surprise!) conquer America. Unfortunately his robot will not work as it lacks a certain component. Unable to create said piece of equipment himself, Doctor Satan is forced into having to steal it. Fortunately, a prominent scientist (C. Montague Shaw) in the area has invented a remote control device of the type that Doctor Satan needs. Doctor Satan deduces the best way to make the scientist hand over the goodies is to threaten his daughter, Lois (Ella Neal). Unfortunately for Satan, Lois also happens to be the apple of Bob Wayne's eye. After much to-ing and fro-ing with the remote

control device, Doctor Satan and his tin can robot are soon dispatched.

The serial is one of the better offerings from Republic, but it is interesting to note that the script was originally written for the Superman character rather than the more ordinary Copperhead. Bob Wayne's alter ego was created after negotiations with DC Comics broke down, the script necessitating a lead character with a dual identity. Nevertheless, Copperhead was an interesting character in that his only disguise was the copper chain mail mask. It does seem remarkable that none of the secondary characters ever spotted that Copperhead and Bob Wayne seemed to share the same wardrobe.

Mere months later, the greatest of the pulp heroes burst upon the screen with all the fury of a damp squib. Columbia managed to take the most interesting of all the pulp characters, The Shadow, and turn him into the most boring of all ►

serial heroes. The catch phrases which are still well-known to many today were abandoned, as were The Shadow's remarkable superhuman abilities and the serial Shadow was more like a masked detective who looked as though he would have trouble fighting his way out of a Girl Scout meeting. With all credit to Victor Jory, a professional actor of long standing, the portrayal of the Shadow was simply wet.

The story concerned the exploits of a mysterious underworld figure, known only as The Black Tiger, who intends to use his many death dealing devices to (not again!) conquer America. However he needs certain materials to complete the inventions and attracts attention to himself by stealing the components rather than quietly buying them. Lamont Cranston, otherwise known as the Shadow, dons various disguises in order to track down the true identity of the master criminal. Particularly ludicrous is the oriental character called Lin Chang, who is none other than The Shadow in disguise.

The Shadow spends most of his time during the serial being knocked both down and out by The Black Tiger and his henchman and displays none of the unusual abilities that lead to his success in the pulp field. It is beyond doubt that Columbia's handling of the character was inept. They displayed no understanding of what made The Shadow so successful, which is underlined by the fact that Columbia's version of the Shadow lasted one story while the pulp character lasted 325 stories, an unprecedented achievement in the history of text fiction. The record still stands today.

The film rights to the character have recently been repurchased from Conde Nast, the copyright holders of the Shadow, and it is expected that a new film version of the Shadow could be headed our way sometime in the not-too-distant future. The ideal director for such a project would be Roman Polanski, or if his vision of the character were too bleak then Orson Welles. But whoever is chosen to transfer the Shadow to the screens once more let's hope he takes the time to read some of the original stories from the early thirties and tries to capture a little of the brooding darkness that was

for twenty years the character's hallmark.

Far more successful on every level was the Republic adaptation of Captain Marvel, *The Adventures of Captain Marvel* (1941), directed by William Whitney and John English.

The action begins when members of the Malcolm Scientific Expedition, investigating the history of the Scorpion dynasty in Siam, enter a forbidden chamber inside an underground tomb. An erupting volcano causes a cave-in, trapping all of the expedition except for young Billy Batson (Frank Coghlan Jr.), who refused to enter the chamber. Billy is confronted by the guardian of the tomb, a white haired old man called Shazam (Nigel de Brulier). He is told that because he alone obeyed the orders not to enter the tomb he is to be rewarded

with powers beyond that of any mortal. By merely uttering the name of his mentor, Billy Batson is able to transform himself into Captain Marvel (Tom Tyler). Before fading away, Shazam tells Billy that his powers will last only as long as "The Golden Scorpion" is threatened. At that very instant, far below in the sacred chamber in the underground tomb, the scientists of the Malcolm Expedition have discovered the legendary Golden Scorpion of which Shazam speaks. It is, in reality, a powerful weapon which operates by focussing the power of several lenses. The scientists divide the lenses up among themselves so that none may use the weapon.

The expedition returns to America unaware that they are followed by a sinister individual who calls himself The Scorpion.



Above: *The World's Mightiest Mortal* Captain Marvel (Tom Tyler) gets to grips with the arch villain The Scorpion (Harry North) in *The Adventures of Captain Marvel* (1941).

Opposite top: A youthful Billy Batson (Frank Coghlan Jr) encounters the ancient Magician Shazam (Nigel de Brulier) and is granted the powers of Captain Marvel.

Opposite below: A portrait of Tom Tyler as Captain Marvel.

The villain sets about acquiring each of the five lenses. The devious Scorpion announces publicly that he has all but one of the lenses and that he will kill any one standing between him and the final lens. Naturally each of the scientists rushes home to check on the safety of his lens. Which is exactly what the wily Scorpion was banking on. Billy learns that the Scorpion's men have made off with the lenses and transforms himself to Captain Marvel. The constant presence of both Billy and Marvel at the scene of each of the Scorpion's crimes leads Malcolm (Robert Strange), leader of the original expedition, to assume that they are both in league with the arch-villain. The Scorpion too has noticed a connection between Captain Marvel and the members of the original expedition. He decides to capture Billy and Betty (Louis Currie) to use as bait to lure Captain Marvel into a trap. As his henchmen capture Betty, Billy is alerted and changes to Captain Marvel to give chase. But the Scorpion witnesses the transformation. Awaiting the right moment he traps Billy and other members of the expedition. He tries to force Billy to reveal the secret of his powers. Billy nods his agreement and as his gag is removed he yells the magic word. Captain Marvel rescues the expedition and captures the Scorpion, revealing him to be Professor Bentley (Harry Worth), one of the members of the Malcolm Expedition. Bentley tries to escape and falls in front of the Golden Scorpion, which instantly disintegrates him. Captain Marvel destroys the deadly artifact, changing back to Billy as his powers fade away.

The Adventures of Captain Marvel is generally recognised as one of the best of the superhero serials. The special effects were nothing short of stupendous, with the flying sequences rivaling those created for Superman the Movie nearly forty years later.

The same year that The Adventures of Captain Marvel was released the Spider made a triumphant return in the 15 episode Columbia serial, The Spider Returns (now there's a catchy title!). The cliffhanger was directed with too many cheap laughs and too few thrills by James W. Thorne. Unlike the earlier Spider serial, which also starred





Top: Lewis Wilson as Batman and Douglas Croft as Robin in the 1943 Columbia serial *Batman*. Above: Dick Purcell as Captain America (1944) puts another hoodlum in traction.

Warren Hull in the lead role. The Spider Returns was made during Columbia's "funny" period, where they were angling their serial output towards the younger end of the market, whom they assumed were more interested in slapstick humour than adventure. The villain of the piece, The Gargoyle (Corbett Harris), is completely over the top as he rants and raves at his totally incompetent underlings. But by the time the serial made it into the cinemas, the popularity of the Spider's magazine had waned seriously, as had the selling power of all pulp magazines. The comic heroes had taken over!

When they brought the rights to Captain Marvel from the comic company Fawcett, Republic also acquired the rights to Spy Smasher. Transferring the character to the screen in 1942, with Kane Richmond in the starring role (he also doubled as Spy Smasher's twin brother). The serial was an epic, thrill-laden offering as the two brothers pursued The Mask around Europe in an effort to put an end to his crimes of espionage.

Columbia's next serial was a 15 episode cliffhanger, *Batman* (1943). Produced while the studio was still under the delusion that the public wanted laughs not

thrills, *Batman* is an embarrassing knock-about comedy show, with dollops of propaganda so heavy-handed as to make the audience's toes curl. J. Carrol Naish (who should have known better) played Doctor Daka, a buck-toothed, leering Japanese caricature. *Batman* (Lewis Wilson) and Robin the Boy Wonder (Douglas Croft) discover that Daka is heading a crime ring and uses his power to transform people (and, no doubt audiences) into Zombies to aid the Axis alliance. When Daka attempts to steal America's supply of Radium, *Batman* and Robin foil his plans. Understandably annoyed at this interference, Daka kidnaps *Batman*'s girlfriend (girlfriend!!), Linda (Shirley Patterson). Naturally, the crimefighters rescue her. Eventually, Daka falls into an alligator pit and is eaten alive, much to the relief of the audience.

A less accurate, but more entertaining, adaptation was Republic's version of *Captain America* (1944). Directed in 15 episodes by B. Reeves Eason, the screen *Captain America* lacked such comic book features as a boy assistant, a shield and little wings on the side of his mask. Nevertheless, Republic spared no expense on the chapterplay, making it the most expensive Republic serial of all.

The plot was remarkably similar to the story of *The Adventures of Captain Marvel*, with *The Scarab* standing in for *The Scorpion*. Naturally, *The Scarab* is merely the disguise of one of the secondary characters in the story who wants to lay his hands on the ultimate weapon, *The Dynamic Vibrator* (!), a fabulously powerful device which harnesses sound and light and converts it into deadly destructive rays. *The Scarab* uses a poison called the Purple Death to eliminate those who stand in his way, but when *Captain America* steals his poison from him he uses the *Dynamic Vibrator* to wipe *Captain America* from the face of the globe. Interestingly, the *Scarab* doesn't die by stepping into the path of a beam of his own creating at the end of this serial. In fact, good old American justice prevails and *The Scarab* is lead to the electric chair for his crimes.

It seems strange that the original superhero, *Superman*, while first to appear in the comic was the last to make it onto the cinema screens. Yet the fifteen

episode serial Superman, starring Kirk Alyn as Superman and Noel Neill as Lois Lane became one of Columbia's biggest money-makers, enjoying extensive runs in A-grade movie theatres.

The chapterplay began with a retelling of the baby Superman's trip to Earth and his job at the Daily Planet disguised as the mild-mannered reporter Clark Kent. But soon, Superman's services are needed to combat the devious plans of the delicious Spider Lady (played by the equally delicious Carole Forman in a blonde wig). The Spider Lady forces Dr Graham (Herbert Rawlinson), the well-intentioned (!) inventor of a deadly reducer ray, to build her a duplicate of the devastating weapon and threatens to destroy Metropolis if the government doesn't hand over the reins of power. To prevent Superman's interference, The Spider Lady has managed to acquire a radio-active fragment of the planet Krypton — Superman's home planet, you'll recall — which has the power to render our hero helpless. Superman naturally puts an end to The Spider Lady's scheming, destroying the Reducer Ray and neutralising the Kryptonite with a lead-lined uniform.

The following year, Superman's stable mate Batman made a comeback bid in a 15 episode serial directed by Spencer Bennet. This time out Columbia left out the cheap laughs and concentrated their efforts into thrill, action and atmosphere. Robert Lowery played the Caped Crusader, with John Duncan as Robin the Boy Wonder, as the Dynamic Duo crossed swords with the villain known as the Wizard. The story detailed the ►



Top: Kirk Alyn as Superman (1948) frees Jimmy Olsen after his capture by villains. Above: Batman and Robin unmasked! A scene from the second Batman serial, *Batman and Robin* (1949) starring Robert Lowery and John Duncan. Below: The Caped Crusader and his youthful companion in *Batman and Robin*.



search by Batman and Robin for a "Remote Control Device" which has been invented by the well-meaning scientist (yawn!) Professor Hammil (William Fawcett). The Wizard and his gang are routed when they raid a jewellery shop to steal the diamond necessary for the device to work.

The following year saw the last of the Superhero serials. Kirk Alyn once again donned the familiar red cape of Superman in *Atom Man vs Superman* (15 episodes, Columbia, 1950). Of course we all knew that Atom Man would turn out to be Superman's most famous foe, Lex Luthor. Luthor exposes Superman to the deadly Kryptonite, weakening his powers, then proceeds to go on a crime spree in Metropolis. But the criminal doesn't realise that effects of Kryptonite are only temporary and Superman returns, his powers restored, to thwart the evil plans of the villain.

When Superman was turned into a tv series during the 1950s Noel Neill returned to play Lois Lane. And in the 1978 Superman movie Kirk Alyn and Noel Neill were to play the parents of the young Lois Lane on board the train which the youthful Clark Kent races early in the film. Unfortunately, most of their appearance ended up on the cutting room floor, but it is still possible to discern Alyn, Neill and the child who plays Lois as they



stare out the window of the train at the teenager who is running along side their train.

The rest of the 1950s saw the brief re-emergence of the science fiction serials, with *Commando Cody*, who appeared in a total of four serials (though the first was under a different name, *Rocket Man*). *King of the Rocket Men* (1949) starred ex-heavy Tristram Coffin in the leading role. Then the flying suit reappeared, this time under the name of *Commando Cody* with George Wallace as the hero, in *Radar Men from the Moon* (12 episodes, Republic, 1952). Another *Commando Cody*, this time starring Judd Holdren, was rushed into the cinemas by Republic entitled *Zombies of the Stratosphere* (12 episodes, 1952).

Enjoying an unexpected success with their *Commando Cody* character, Republic prepared a tv series, *Commando Cody — Sky Marshall of the Universe*, with Judd Holdren as the pilot of the rocket suit. But the series never made it onto the small screen and was released directly to the cinemas as a 12 chapter serial.

By 1953 the reign of the science fiction and superhero serials was over. Three years later the last ever serial was released, a Canadian Mounties effort called *Perils of the Wilderness* (for any one who's interested!). An era was dead and though the serial may not have contributed very much to the cinema in an artistic sense they gave two generations of cinema-goers enough thrills and memories to last them a life time.



Top: Kirk Alyn as Superman in *Atom Man vs Superman* (1950). Above: A scene from *Radar Men from the Moon* (1952), in which George Wallace as *Commando Cody* holds three of Villain Retik's henchmen at bay Clayton Moore, Peter Brocco and Bob Stevenson.

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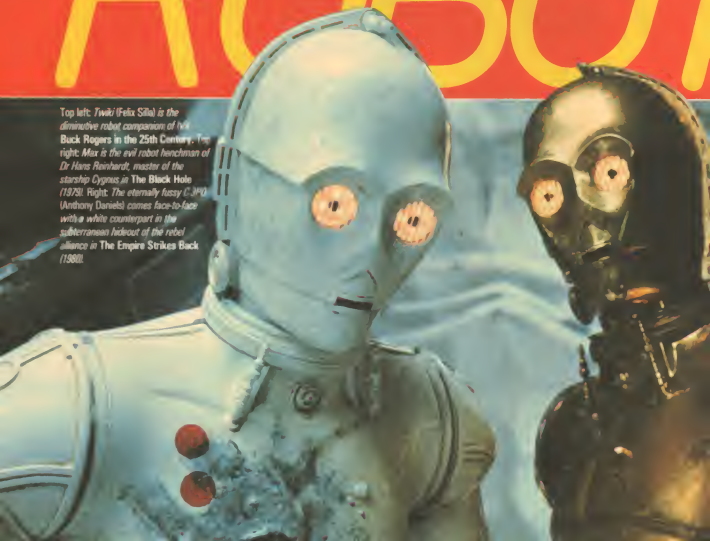
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ROBOT

Top left: *Twiki* (Felix Silla) is the diminutive robot companion of *Will Buck Rogers* in the 25th Century. Top right: *Max* is the evil robot henchman of *Dr. Hans Reinhardt*, master of the starship *Cygnus* in *The Black Hole* (1979). Right: The eternally fussy *C-3PO* (Anthony Daniels) comes face-to-face with his white counterpart in the subterranean hideout of the rebel alliance in *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980).





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The word "Robot" first coined by the Czech playwright Karel Capek in his play R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots), is derived from the Czechoslovakian word *robota* meaning forced labour. Others have gone on to elaborate and expand the mythology surrounding the robot. For example, famed science-fiction author Isaac Asimov first set out his Three Laws of Robotics in his 1950 collection, *Robot*.

1. A Robot may not injure a human being, or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
2. A Robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.
3. A Robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Laws.

Laudable though the above precepts are, far too few of the science-fiction robots appear to have been built to such specifications. The earliest of science-fiction robots were frequently the tools of mad scientists bent on World Domination. The first of these appeared in the 1926 Fritz Lang film, *Metropolis*. The story involves a stratified society in which the rich are very rich and the poor labour far beneath the city, tending the machines which provide power for the community. All is well until a beautiful young girl, Maria (Brigitte Helm) leads some of the workers' children into the affluent and wasteful life of Freder (Gustav Frohlich), the son of Frederson (Alfred Abel) the head of *Metropolis*. "These are your brothers," she tells him. Freder is appalled at the ill-health of the children yet captivated by the beauty of Maria. He abandons his life style and goes off to the subterranean world of the working classes in an effort to find the girl. He discovers that his life of luxury has only been made possible by the hardship and suffering of others. Maria is seen by her people as a kind of saviour who will lead them to better times. Meanwhile, Frederson has discovered that his son has deserted the soft life for the world below. He orders the kidnapping of the rebellious young woman. Maria plots with an evil underman, Rotwang (Rudolph Klein-Rogge), to replace the girl with a robot duplicate. The robot is then to lead the workers to revolt and bring

death and destruction upon themselves, thereby destroying Maria, and others who may come after her. Needless to say, the plan goes wrong and the destruction spreads to the surface. Maria and Frederson are forced to seal tunnels with the workers to rebuild the city for the benefit of all. The closing scenes of the silent film points out that the hearts (the love) of Maria and Freder must mediate between the head (Frederson) and the hands (the workers).

The film can be seen as a very heavy-handed statement on the conditions in Germany at that time. After the Great War most of the nation's wealth was left in the hands of the minority while the majority suffered. The tragedy was that in real life Maria was a traitor.

On an artistic level, the film was a stunner. Art director Fritz Hunte, Rich Kettelhut and Karl Volkmann created a city of classical Art Deco sweep. Karl Freund (who later went on to photograph many of the great horror films of the thirties and fifties, Karloff in *The Mummy*, 1932) directed the scenes of director Fritz Lang in an atmospheric fashion, displaying both the utopian vistas of the city and the gloom and dependency of the subterranean realm, with equal enthusiasm.

The robot costume worn by Brigitte Helm was seen only briefly in the film as the cold metallic features of the robot were quickly replaced by those of Maria. Nevertheless, the filmmakers meticulously created a complex and convincing suit. Starting with a full body-cast of Brigitte Helm, the special effects team constructed the costume piece by piece using a type of synthetic wood material. The suit was articulated at the joints and finally given a coat of aluminium paint to simulate a metallic finish.

After such a promising start, it seems a pity that robots on the screen became shambling tin-can men in the *Metropolis* robot. The film presented dozens of robots, none of them the least imaginative of the. Heroes like Gene Autry, Robert Willcox and Robert Kent faced mechanical monsters such as the chaffengers as *The Phantom Empire* (1935), *The Mysterious Doctor Satan* (1940) and *The Phantom Circus* (1939) respectively. The robot was being used by scriptwriters as a mindless marauding monster that could be used to menace heroines and fight

with heroes.

Then in 1951, a similar attempt was made to break away from the pattern set down by the serials. 20th Century-Fox made a film version of the Harry Bates short story, "Farewell to the Master." Beginning production as *Journey to the World*, the film was finally renamed as *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. The plot bore little resemblance to the original story. It begins with the arrival on Earth of an emissary from another (unnamed) world. The ambassador (Michael Rennie) emerges from his spaceship before a bewildered nation and extends a strange device. In the ranks a soldier panics and fires a shot. The alien falls to the ground. A vast movement above the natural violence of the human animal. For the device was his weapon. "It was a gift for the President of America. An instrument with which he could study life on other planets."

However, the alien does not come unprepared. As he pulls himself up off the ground, a huge light appears in the doorway of the spaceship. An eight-foot, smooth-skinned robot. The robot promptly begins to march and generally causes havoc among the suburban armed forces. This demonstration of power completed the alien's mission. He identifies himself as Klaatu and his robot counterpart as Gort. He points out that his is a peaceful mission. The rest of the film becomes an unlikely allegory, paralleling the events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Klaatu decides to deal with the leaders and politicians and instead escapes into the streets to mix with the "ordinary folk." Hiding behind the name of Mr. Carpenter, Klaatu preaches a philosophy of peace and harmony. At one point he is so angered by the selfishness of Man that he moves to suspend all sources of energy on Earth, causing the Earth to literally stand still. Klaatu is also imprisoned at one point though he is freed by Gort. Finally, he is betrayed by a character who seems to be behind him and is executed by the forces of Earth. The body is recovered by Gort and returned to the spaceship. Here Klaatu is resurrected for a short while before returning to the skies, leaving behind a warning to fix by the philosophy of Peace.

The part of Gort was played by the seven-foot, seven-inch doorman of the Greenwich Chinese Theatre in Hollywood, Lock Martin. Art director Addison Hehr decided to

give the robot a kind of "fluid metal" look. The material chosen for the costume was foam rubber painted silver except for the helmet which was constructed from sheet metal. Two suits were made, one that had laces down the front of the torso and one which laced down the back. This meant that director Robert Wise could shoot the robot from either in front or from behind and yet never have anything visible. The art department also

constructed a nine foot dummy to be used in the scenes where the robot was not required to move. Unfortunately, the costume acted like a heat trap and Martin was only able to endure the suit for a few hours at a time. This coupled with the fact that Martin was not a strong man, meant that certain "acts" called for in the screenplay were almost impossible. For example, no separate onscreen Gort had to carry people. For the scene in which he had to pick up Irving Neel, a special bench was used to support him weight. And in those shots where Gort was called upon to carry Klaatu, both men's costumes weighed only a few pounds were used. For the scenes in which Gort uses his heat ray, a special helmet was built and was shot

against a black background. The heat ray itself was added optically by the special effects department.

But the most important twist of the original Harry Bates story was omitted from the screenplay by Edmund North. Bates ending had the robot Gort (or Gort as he was called at first) turn out to be the master and Klaatu the servant, turning everything that it is responsible to show the facts from appearances.

Robots were strangely ignored for almost 10 years despite the success of *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. It was not for shaming portrayals of invading "monsters." In 1935, Phil Ticker directed the first awful Robot Monster. The robot in this film consisted of nothing more than a man (George Barrows) to be dressed wearing a gorilla costume with a deep sea diving helmet over the head. Consequently, while this robot was causing the population of Earth to exactly fix, an internal robot, The Great One, took over a drone and caused the monster (Man) to disappear. George played this part too. "You see," was his gentle cue!

Not wanting to be left out, Britain pitched in with a robotic offering of its own. DevilGon from



[illegible][illegible][illegible][illegible][illegible][illegible]

(1954). Also faintly resembling cardboard boxes with arms and legs inside. Mutilating mutant humanoid beings were broadcast from the planet Venus and final death rays from Meco's mouth on their heads. Lucky for Earth a group of scientists manage to bring the robots to heel by destroying their "cathode ray tubes". The film ends with a character declaring that the glass tubes had been made of mica. There would have been no way of stopping them. Huh?

Two years later, in 1956, came the best-loved and best-remembered of all screen robots: Robbie the Robot. The movie was Forbidden Planet and the robot, of course, was Robbie.

The story is set in the year 2240 AD, when the influence of Earth has spread the Galaxy. You, Man, has it in the back of your mind of the other planets. A military spaceship, Cruiser C-57D, is dispatched from Earth to investigate the strange disappearance of the Bellerophon expedition assigned to the planet Altair IV 25 years ago. As the cruiser touches down, it is the crew discovers the broken planet is abandoned by a race, humanoid in form. The driver is a strange mechanical man, Robbie the Robot. Robbie drives the captain of the Cruiser, Commander Adams (Lester Nielsen) and his team of four.

Claymunt (Dick Cusow (William Sowers) and Lieutenant Farman (Jack Kelly) to the house of Dr. Morbius (Walter Pidgeon) and his daughter Altair (Anne Francis). The officers are impressed by Robbie though Morbius, sensing the robot is something he tinkered up in his spare time. Adams enquires about the rest of the expedition. Morbius tells him that they were all killed by a mysterious force. Only he and his wife were spared. His wife died soon of natural causes. Adams vents that they must have left Altair IV. Morbius is reluctant but agrees to make preparations for departure. The officers return to their ship. That night an invisible force seizes the ship and lifts it off. Adams returns to Morbius home to tell him that his mysterious force is a real thing. Morbius says that he will have Robbie manufacture the machine's remains to make the best possible of them. Meanwhile he offers the ship. Adams and Ostrow learn of the things he has discovered on the planet Altair IV. He tells them that Robbie the planet is as far from a vast space of intergalactic technology. The essence of the Krell is revealed. He shows them his power bank and an attempt to kill himself. Adams, but confesses that his heart is torn about leaving the

meaning of most of the equipment. He asks Adams to visit his crew and leave the planet. The mysterious force hasn't harmed him or his daughter in the twenty-five years they have been there. Adams is still convinced and decides that he must use the brain booster to find out what's happening on the planet. But Ostrow beats him to it. The brain is too much for Ostrow's untrained mind and he dies. But not before revealing the terrible secret of Altair IV. The machinery of the Krell was designed to free them from the need of physical labour. It can turn the thought of a well-trained physicist into reality. The mysterious force is a thing produced by the power of the Krell combined with the power of Morbius' mind, a mind expanded by the Krell Brain Booster. Adams returns to his work and prepares for what he calls later that night the Morbius Plan. Morbius did think the power and it repelled in a spectacular battle. Adams returns to Morbius' house and continues to work with the robot that he is responsible for the deaths of the expedition members and those of leaving C-57D to crash. Morbius is convinced by just what he has already said that the machine is more than just a machine. In reply, Morbius, Adams and Adams in the house. Finally convinced in the Krell temple, Morbius confesses to them that Adams and Altair can escape Altair and Robbie will return Earth with Cruiser C-57D.

The film serves as a colorful backdrop for the actions of Robbie the Robot. Robbie was designed by MGM production designer Maurice Harbiner, who was named over his design to Bob Keeshan as film was working blueprint. The blueprint was based along to Jack Harkness, the MGM photography department, who supervised the building of the full-size robot seen in the film. One of the prop shop technicians later stated that he was the man who built Robbie, but taking the responsibility of the design. Actor Fred Goetz was replaced by actors Frank Carpenter and Frank Conroy. The dry humor of Cyril Munk's dialogue, coupled with the fairly superior work of Marvin Miller about many to the character of Robbie. The film, along with the success of the film, is a good example of the creation. Robbie's ability to move at a tremendous rate from within a confined in a limited, and even between the ship's inside (Earth).



Below: Farrah Fawcett as the mercy of Hector the Robot in Saturn 3 (1970). Muffet, the robot dog from Bartleby the Galley (1970).



escape the high-pressure life of New York by moving to the sleepy Connecticut hamlet of Stepford. However, barely have they settled in when the wife, Joanna (Katherine Ross) notices the strange vacuous personality common to the Stepford wives. With her husband spending more and more time at the mysterious Men's Association, Joanna teams up with rebellious new arrival Bobby (Paula Prentiss) and tries to find out what is behind the behaviour of the wives. Joanna begins to fear the worst when Bobby joins the ranks of the vacant-eyed women, and soon discovers the awful secret of Stepford first hand. She breaks into the Men's Association building alone and comes face-to-face with a robot duplicate of herself. The robot kills her and takes her place. The film has an important message about the ideal woman as seen by man and the ideal woman as seen by women. The Men of Stepford, symbolising the Men of the world, are in effect robbing their wives of their individuality and whittling them down to zombie-like, home-loving zombies who live only to serve in both the kitchen and the bedroom.

Far more light-hearted were George Lucas' robot creations which appeared in both Star Wars (1977) and The Empire Strikes Back (1980). The main robot characters were a Lando and Han Solo team of mechanical droids, See-Threepio and Artoo-Detoo. See-Threepio (C-3PO, the tall gold one) was designed by Ralph McQuarrie and owes more than a little inspiration to the 1926 robot of Metropolis The Robotrix. Played with all the fussing and flapping of a vintage camp English butler by Anthony Daniels, Threepio is the sort of character that is more of a hindrance than a help in a tight corner. Far less excitable is his travelling companion Artoo, mostly a radio-controlled device but in close-up was played by 3ft 6in Kenny Baker.

The appearance of the Star Wars robots opened the floodgates for less-inspired imitations. The trouble with the robots that followed was that their creators misunderstood the reasons behind the success of Lucas' mechanical men. Threepio and Artoo lacked the omnipotence of such screen creations as Robbie yet presented a sentient personality. The result was that through their very helplessness, the Star Wars robots drew sympathy from an audience that had come to view movie robots with a mixture of distrust and indifference.



The eternally popular Daleks from the BBC tv series, Doctor Who. The creatures are not actually robots, but living creatures deformed to live in mutated casings of their lives.

Twink (Felix Silla) who appeared in Buck Rogers in the 25th Century (feature film and tv series) comes closest to the Star Wars style of robot. He is played as more of a comedian though, an aspect underlined by the use of Mel Blanc to dub in Twink's voice. (Blanc is better known as the voice of Bugs Bunny in the Warner Bros cartoons).

An interesting use of a robot was in the 25th Century-Fox release Alien (1979). The story details the plight of a group of interstellar truck drivers who make an ill-fated landing on a forbidding alien world and inadvertently bring a weird life form aboard their ship. It turns out that the ship had been planted all the time and that the corporation that employs them wants to get its hands on the Alien so badly that they are willing to sacrifice the crew to do so. Just to make sure that the crew do not succeed in destroying the specimen, the corporation also plants a robot crewman (Ian Holm) aboard the ship. This action seems to indicate that the corporation knows more about the Alien than the film lets on.

At several points during the previous is apparent that the Alien is dormant until another Me Men comes within a certain range. Certainly the proximity of other living creatures provokes a hostile response in the Alien. What better environment for such a creature than a robot?

Yet another example of the 'marauding monster' version of robotics was Hector, a featured player in the 1980 film Sixteen 3 Programmed by Harvey Keitel, brainwaves the robot to overcome by an unrequited love for Farrah Fawcett and destroys all who stand between him and the object of his affections. Nevertheless the design of the robot was interesting, even if the plot was not.

The future looks a little bleak for the screen robot. With the exception of the Hammer Threepio and Artoo in the next Star Wars film, Revenge of the Jedi, there is very little on the horizon in the way of mechanical men in the movies, though we can probably rely on such imaginative tv shows as Doctor Who to keep robots in the public eye until the time is right for the next wave of screen robots.



STARBURST
PIN-UP



The concept of visitors from another world has been with us since H.G.Wells put pen to paper in 1898 and gave us *War of the Worlds*. Yet, strangely, the alien invaders had been curiously ignored in the early days of cinema. It wasn't until 1951 that Howard Hawks turned his attention to the John Campbell story "Who Goes There?" that the cinema's first visitors from Space arrived.

The resulting film, *The Thing* (From Another World) is a strange combination of horror and science fiction. The Thing is discovered by a remote Air Force outpost in the Antarctic entombed in a space ship beneath the ice. A research team digs the ship out and returns to their base with the creature, planning to communicate with it. Unfortunately, the beastie thaws out and the members of the outpost team find that they are being picked off one by one. To further complicate matters, the scientists discover that the alien is dropping spores wherever it goes. And the spores, like their parent, thrive on human blood. Realising the graveness of the situation, the survivors make one last all-out effort

to destroy the creature before it can shed another batch of spores. In the thrilling climax, the monster is electrocuted and, as the current takes effect, *The Thing* dwindles in size and finally disintegrates. The film ends with a news broadcaster imploring the people of Earth to be ever vigilant for the possibility of another alien attack: "Every citizen of the world must become a sentinel watching the skies. Keep looking for the next flying saucer — watch the skies, watch everything over your head — throw a ring of watchtowers around the Earth — keep looking... looking...looking..."

Released later the same year, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* presented an alien of an altogether different stripe. Based on Harry Bates "Farewell to the Master", *Day the Earth Stood Still* pointed out that visitors from other worlds may come in peace and that man must guard against his natural instinct to strike out at what he doesn't understand. Michael Rennie's Klaatu character was quite human in appearance with Lock Martin's robot Gort providing the obligatory



ALIEN

dose of alien menace.

William Cameron Menzies' *Invaders from Mars* (1953) was a low key affair which looks at the concept of alien invasion through the eyes of a young boy. The film has a strange dream-like quality — unsurprising as the film is a sort of dream-movie. The action starts when the boy (Jimmy Hunt) is awakened by a noise outside. Peering out the window he is horrified to see an alien craft land behind a hill at the bottom of his garden and burrow into the ground. Matters are further complicated when both his mother and father are dragged under the soil at the landing site and return with the look of the zombie stamped upon them. The boy seeks help from his teacher and with her aid is able to convince the authorities of the danger. He and the military break into the alien saucer and do battle with the Martians. The



ENS

film ends with the boy waking up to discover that the whole thing has been a dream. As he settles down in his bed again there is a noise outside and we see a flying saucer descend behind the hill at the bottom of the garden...

Invasers from Mars telegraphs its stance and the juvenile nature of its material all the way through. The youthful protagonist showing the army how to defeat the Martians. The Martians themselves with their obviously zippered suits and, more interestingly, the almost subliminal idea that the boy feels alienated from his parents. Nevertheless, *Invasers* is a fascinating film, full of the skill and imagery that made *Menzies* earlier sf classic *Things To Come* (1936) such an important contribution to the genre.

Depicting alien visitors from outer space in a totally different



*Far left: An insect-like Orion from Battistini's *Galactica* (1978), one of a race with an unpleasant sideline in eating human flesh. Centre: A fierce Tuskan Raider, one of the natural inhabitants of the planet Tatooine, in George Lucas' *Star Wars* (1977). Below: Perhaps the most famous alien of them all, Superman, saviour of the planet Krypton.*

manner was Jack Arnold's *It Came From Outer Space* (1953). The film is set in the desert, the terrain against which many of Arnold's films have been shot, and concerns one man's (Richard Carlson) attempts to prove to himself and others that a visitor from beyond the stars had indeed landed in the neighbourhood. Ray Bradbury's story has the man finally confront the aliens only to discover that they had only pulled into Earth to fix a flat tyre — or the space ship's equivalent.

George Pal's *War of the Worlds* (1953) was unique in that it portrayed the Martians engaged in all-out war with the forces of Earth. In truth, "war" would be a very charitable term. Massacre would perhaps be more accurate. The Martians sweep everything the Earth armies can throw at them effortlessly to one side. Up to and including the Atom Bomb. When one kindly old priest attempts to drive back the invaders with the help of a crucifix he is mercilessly incinerated. But by way of retribution, the aliens are soon dying off from what appears to be a flu

virus — one of the "smallest creatures that God in his wisdom put upon the Earth".

The special effects of *War of the Worlds* are — as is to be expected of a George Pal film — superb, but the film is hampered by stiff performances and stiffer script. The Wells story has been transposed — brutally — from 19th century England to 20th century California. And Gene Barry could have, no should have, phoned his performance in.

This *Island Earth* (1955) concerned the efforts of a scientifically advanced race, the Metalunans, to acquire Earth scientists to help build defences to save the planet Metaluna from the ravishes of warlike Zahgons. The project is headed by a Metalunan called Exeter (Jeff Morrow) who tests likely candidates by sending them, in kit form, a complicated communications device called an Interociter. Two successful applicants are Cal Meacham (Rex Reason) and Ruth Adams (Faith Domergue). But once the two scientists arrive at the research institute they realise that Exeter and his colleagues are not



*Above: Professor Cavor and his party meet the Selenites, strange insectoid inhabitants of the moon, in Nigel Kneale / Ray Harryhausen version of the H. G. Wells story, **First Men in the Moon** (1954). Below: The aliens in **The Monolith Monsters** (1958) were rocks! Eventually the menace was defeated by sprinkling salt on their tails. The problem was finding their tails! Opposite: One of the best loved aliens. When Spock first appeared in the tv version **Star Trek** (1966) he stole the show. A broodier Spock appeared in **Star Trek The Motion Picture** (1979).*



human. Attempting to escape in a small plane Cal and Ruth are picked up by a Metalunan saucer and transported to the planet Metaluna. They are told that they will continue their work in an effort to defeat the Zahgons. But Exeter's boss, Monitor (Douglas Spencer), feels that continued fighting is useless and announces that Metaluna will invade Earth. Exeter cares little for this suggestion and helps Cal and Ruth escape in a saucer back to Earth. Unfortunately, the ship is boarded by a Mutant (Eddie Parker), one of the hideous insect-like beings of Metaluna who perform the menial tasks. In a tremendous battle, the monster is killed. Exeter then releases the small plane, with Ruth and Cal aboard, and crashes his saucer into the ocean.

The movie was one of the few science fiction films to be made in colour during the 1950s. The special effects, in particular the scenes of the Metaluna surface, are suitably impressive and Bud Westmore's Mutant makeup is one of the most memorable of the period.

Possibly the worst science fiction film of the 1950s was *Invasion of the Hell Creatures* (*Invasion of the Saucer Men*, 1956). It all revolves around these bug-eyed-monsters from space who are three foot tall, have eyes in their hands and alcohol in their hypodermic fingernails. The little chappies land in a field to take a look around this quaint planet. Unfortunately, one of them is crashed by passing teenagers in a hot rod. The alien is understandably annoyed about this inconvenience and detaches his hand, complete with its general, all-purpose, handy-dandy eyeball. The hand sets about sabotaging every hot rod it can find. Finally the teenagers destroy the invaders — and all detached appendages — by turning their hot rod headlights on them. Simple, no?

Light years ahead of this turkey was Don Siegel's brilliant sf shocker, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956). The movie tells of a silent invasion by a kind of plant life from beyond our solar system. The plant pods produce replicas of human subjects while the humans sleep. The replicas have no emotions and what happens to the human originals is never made clear. The climax of the

film has the hero, Miles Bennell (Kevin McCarthy) and Becky Driscoll (Danna Wynter) running from the small town, pursued by an army of pod people. Bennell finally escapes, but not before Becky is taken over. Finally reaching the authorities in the next town Bennell tries unsuccessfully to convince them that something terrible is happening. Just when all seems lost a report is received of an over turned lorry on the highway. The lorry was carrying a cargo of bizarre giant pods...

It is difficult to convey in mere words the horror conjured up by Invasion of the Body Snatchers. Perhaps something of its terror is contained in the concept of total loss of individuality, equivalent, perhaps, to total loss of liberty, long a very real fear in the Western World. Whether this is true or not, Invasion is very much a product of the McCarthy-ite era that spawned it. So much so that the excellent remake (1979) had only a fraction of the impact.

Ray Harryhausen's 20 Million Miles to Earth (1957) was a far more straightforward Monster from Outer Space movie. The egg from which the creature is spawned is brought back to Earth in a rocket. After its birth, the reptilian creature doubles in size every day. Naturally it escapes and begins to cause havoc in Rome, battling an elephant and the military before being blasted off the top of the the Colosseum with a well-placed bazooka shot. The film is unremarkable as a film. The plot involves nothing more than a rather unsensitive remake of King Kong, but Harryhausen's effects are truly dynamic. Better to see an "edited highlights" version than waste an hour and a half ploughing through the whole film.

One of the great sf horselaughs of the period was the incredibly tacky The Giant Claw (1957). The gaint claw is attached to a giant bird from outer space. The beastie spends the first few reels snatching toy planes out of the skies and stamping on papier mache buildings. Then it begins to build a nest on top of the good old Empire State Building. What kind of bird is it? Why, a turkey, of course!

A British made offering, The Trollenberg Terror (1958), had a



script by Jimmy Sangster but was spoiled by less-than-perfect special effects. The story tells of a giant tentacted eyeball that slithers around a ski resort, ruining the tourist trade.

The next three "Alien from Space" movies really had little to recommend them. The Astounding She Monster (1958) featured a rather sexy 8ft lady from beyond the stars who slinked around in a clingy space suit. In fact the best thing about this regrettable film was the poster. Hmm!

Marginally better (but don't quote me on it) was The Monolith Monsters (1958). In fact the film's very classification in this chapter is even more suspect than the movie's plot. The aliens are in fact chunks of rock that take root and begin to spread across the world. Add to that their ability to dwarf skyscrapers and you have some measure of the

deadliness involved...the film's, that is.

The last of this trio of terrors is The Space Children (1958) a ghastly little item from the usually talented hand of Jack Arnold. The children of American rocketary experts stumble across a brain from outer space who directs them to sabotage America's space programme in the cause of universal peace. This was an all-time low for the director after the heights of Incredible Shrinking Man and It Came from Outer Space.

Better on every level was I Married a Monster from Outer Space (1958). Gloria Talbot coped well with the realisation that she had some-how become matrimonially entangled with an illegal immigrant. The foreign chap in question is on Earth scouting real estate. All it needs is his signal and hordes of others, just like him, will descend



Top: Captain Jack's jungle warlord and Kitten the movie star, here at Shind's office in *Radio Boy and the Stars* (1957). Right: The giant tentacle monster, also as featured in *The Astounding She Monster* (1958). The creature is actually a radio-controlled mechanical figure operated by a group of technicians. Shind's talent from the stage played as *Superman*. Nor is a superpowered criminal who escapes imprisonment and invades Earth with two companions in *Superman II* (1981).



upon an unsuspecting world. Unless Gloria can do something about that. Nevertheless the film has some chilling moments.

But in case you're getting complacent, here's another trio of awful aliens. Not of This Earth (1958) was a lesser offering from the usually able stable of Roger Corman. Beverly Garland spends most of the film being menaced by a rather dress conscious alien (never seen without a hat) who has arrived on Earth to investigate the possibility of using our planet as a kind of blood bank. Naturally the citizens of the world are less than enthusiastic at the prospect and track down and kill the visitor. The movie ends on a downbeat note with another alien arriving to take over.

Talking of downbeat, we're sure that The Blob (1958) is the sort of movie that a big star like the late

Steve McQueen would have liked to have forgotten. But for all its hokiness, the film still comes over as an amusing tale of the arrival of a chunk of interstellar goo and its subsequent fate at the hands of the angry Earth folk. The blob has some intentionally funny scenes such as the discovery of the creature upon its arrival by a bumbling bumpkin who pokes it with a stick. Annoyed by this irreverent treatment, the blob climbs up the stick and engulfs the babbling chap. The movie has passable special effects and a great "I'm-not-taking-this-seriously" performance by McQueen.

Based on John Wyndam's terrifying story of invader plants from another world Britain's Day of the Triffids was realised in 1963 as a rather mediocre film. During a pyrotechnical meteor shower the entire population of the Earth is struck blind. Well, almost the entire population. And hard on the heels of the meteors are strange plants which quickly take root in English country gardens and soon grow to huge proportions. Worse yet are the poisonous tentacles concealed in the heads of the creatures. Before long, the plants have uprooted themselves and are sauntering around the countryside, striking down blind humans and feasting on the bodies. But unlike the original novel, which left Mother Earth in the grasp of the carnivorous plants, the movie has the hero lure the Triffids to the sea and hose them down with salt water which, naturally, just happens to dissolve the beasties.

Aliens were given a rest for the next few years, with a few unnotable exceptions (such as The Green Slime and the Toho monster movies).

Nic Roeg's Man Who Fell to Earth (1975) was similar in some respects to the story told by Robert Heinlein's Stranger in a Strange Land. In fact, rumour has it that this was the story of that Roeg originally wanted to film. Nevertheless Man Who Fell to Earth is a fascinating visual piece telling of the attempts of The Man (David Bowie) to colonise Earth, the subsequent loss of his extraterrestrial powers and his downhill slide into alcoholism and obscurity.

Extraterrestrials burst upon the scene with vengeance in George



Lucas' *Star Wars* (1978). Strictly speaking, every character in the story is an alien, since the tale is set in "a long time ago in a Galaxy, far, far away". High up on the list of visual delights from that film is the sequence in which the heroes venture into a Western style saloon, literally packed with aliens of all shapes, sizes and persuasions. Even the members of the jazz band playing there are blue!

Released only a few months later, Stephen Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* treated aliens in a totally different way. Whereas *Star Wars* had been a fun movie, *Close Encounters* was almost religious in its reverence. It quite rightly pointed out that any alien race sufficiently motivated to span the stars would just as likely be friendly as hostile, a theme sadly missing from such films since *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951). The film follows the progress of Roy Neary (Richard Dreyfuss) who has had a "close encounter of the first kind" — actual sighting of a UFO. Compelled to trek across the country to Devil's Tower Wyoming, Neary is confused and bewildered, until he discovers that Devil's Tower is to be the site for a close encounter of the third kind — contact!

Doug Trumbull's UFO effects are truly extraordinary, but the film is sadly let down by the appearance of the aliens. They look like what they are. Children dressed up in masks and false hands. However, Spielberg nearly pulls the trick off and sets a very high standard indeed for those who will follow.

The title star of *Superman* is, as we all know, an alien. Born on the planet Krypton, Superman is sent to Earth as an infant to escape the destruction of his home. When he arrives on Earth he is discovered to have fantastic superhuman powers which he dedicates to the fighting of crime and injustice. The film of *Superman* (1978) boasted some fine scenes on the planet of Krypton before its destruction, though like *Superman*, the inhabitants of Krypton are as human in appearance as you or I.

More spectacular were the aliens seen in Robert Wise's tedious film version of *Star Trek*. The film opens with the *Enterprise* being recommissioned to head out into



Gillman and Barry Guker under attack by extraterrestrials in Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1978).

space to investigate an alien presence which is approaching Earth, destroying research outposts and navigational beacons as it comes. Admiral Kirk (William Shatner) wrests control of the starship from its current commander (Stephen Collins) and sets off to destroy the invader. Accompanying him are his alien first officer, Spock the Vulcan, (Leonard Nimoy), and his faithful surgeon Bones McCoy (De Forest Kelley). Also aboard was the fascinating extraterrestrial Ilia (Persis Khambatta), a native of the planet Delta, who must take a vow of celibacy for fear of driving mortal men insane. Hmm!

But for all the budget dollars spent and for all the excellence of the tv series, *Star Trek the Motion Picture* ends up as *Star Trek the Slow Motion Picture*. Lacking in human conflict (an ingredient that contributed to the success of the tv show) and enough meat in its plot the

film emerged as simply boring.

Far more effective was *Alien* (1979). Drawing heavily on the 1958 cheapie *It the Terror from Beyond Space*, the film has an Earth space ship invaded by a marauding creature from another world. Though presenting nothing new in terms of content it is the style of the movie that separates it from the herd. Attention to detail is high on the list of priorities and Ridley Scott depicts a believable world in which interstellar truckers not only exist but leave half-consumed cups of coffee lying on work surfaces and have pinups tacked above benches.

Unfortunately, even to this day the film company 20th Century-Fox have refused to release pictures of the H.R. Giger designed creature. Any images of the nightmarish, half-machine half-organism will have to be drawn from the reader's memory. Which, if the film has done its job, shouldn't be too hard!



Spaceships have been a part of science fiction mythology since its beginnings. Film-makers soon realised the visual possibilities of the space ship and capitalised on the concept. From *A Trip to the Moon* to *The Empire Strikes Back* we examine the craft of spacecraft in

SPACESHIPS

As early as 1865 Man had considered the possibility of travelling through space, protected from the harsh environment by a metal capsule. Jules Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon* (1865, translated 1873) had human astronauts make the journey in a metal capsule fired from a gun. Twenty eight years later, H.G. Wells book *First Men on the Moon* used an anti-gravity material to effect the same trip. But it was Verne's book that was filmed, in 1902 as *Voyage dans la Lune*, by Georges Méliès.

Méliès' film borrowed heavily from the ideas laid down in Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon* and Wells' *First Men in the Moon*. The astronauts of *A Trip to the Moon* climb willingly into a bullet-shaped spaceship which is then fired at the moon by means of a vast cannon. Blissfully ignorant of the fact that they should be smeared across the back wall of the ship after suffering the same incredible G-forces experienced by a bullet, our intrepid heroes gambol happily on the lunar surface without any visible breathing

apparatus.

In all fairness it should be noted that Méliès' film was devised to capitalise on the novelty of the cinema and to create a sense of wonderment in its audiences. It was another seventeen years before a filmmaker would look at the problems of space travel with any kind of seriousness.

In 1919 British Gaumont released a silent version of H.G. Wells' *First Men in the Moon*. Unfortunately, little is known about the film and it is uncertain whether any prints have

survived.

Fritz Lang's *Woman in the Moon* (*Die Frau Im Mond*) was scripted by Lang's wife Thea Von Harbou and depicted, with alarming accuracy, such standard moon launch elements as a countdown sequence and weightless conditions in space. However, the movie is not without scientific howlers and falls into the trap of showing the moon as having a breathable atmosphere.

The following year the Fox-Movietone film *Just Imagine* went one step further and included a trip to Mars in its storyline. The movie was a musical comedy first and a science fiction film second and the film is largely forgotten today. But the Mars ship proved enduring enough after making its second film appearance in the Universal serial *Flash Gordon* (1936).

The H. G. Wells scripted *Things to Come* (1936) covered the years 1936 to 2036 and concerned the first trip into space. Scientists Cabal (Raymond Massey) and Passworthy (Pickles Livingstone) conspire to send their son and daughter into space despite opposition from the sculptor Theatocopolus (Cedric Hardwicke). But despite the lavishness of the production, the filmmakers insisted on putting Man into space by firing him out of a gun.

It wasn't until 1950 that George Pal's more scientifically — accurate *Destination Moon* was released. Co-scripted by Robert Heinlein and 'Rip' Van Rinkel based on Heinlein's own novel *Rocketship Galileo*, the film started life as *Journey to the Moon*. The script came into Pal's hands and, with a few revisions became *Operation Moon*. One more title change, to *Destination Moon*, and the story went before the cameras. The famous astronomical artist Chesley Bonestell was recruited as a technical advisor and worked closely with special effects man Lee Zavitz and production designer Ernst Fegte. The story has the first Earth Moon shot touching down on the moon in an atomic-powered single stage ship. But it is discovered that the ship lacks the fuel to get all its passengers safely back to Earth. After a few boyscout attempts at self-sacrifice, the crew decide to ditch all extraneous objects — bedding, spare oxygen cylinders, radio — in an attempt to reduce the weight of the

flight. The vast Cylon Mothership used by the murderous cylons as a fighter base in the first of the post-*Star Wars* cycle, *Battlestar Galactica* (1978). Below: A really different type of spaceship, interestingly enough from an early "visitor from space" picture, *It Came from Outer Space* (1953).



ship. Needless to say, the return trip is made with fuel to spare.

Later the same year Lippert Films released their low budget space movie *Rocketship X-M*. Despite the similarities between this space movie and *Destination Moon*, the film stands up well. It concerns the efforts of a five man crew to pilot their single stage rocket to the moon. Unfortunately, a meteor storm deflects the ship and it ends up on Mars. The crew have a run-in with the locals and the ship lifts off from Mars with its crew short-handed to the tune of two men.

Up until 1951, films featuring space travel had assumed that spaceships would be built and piloted exclusively by Earthmen. No one had considered the possibility of space pilots visiting Earth. *The Day the Earth Stood Still* changed all that. The movie told of the visit to Earth by the alien Klotu and his robot aide Gort (see our chapter on robots) in a sleek, saucer-shaped craft. The design of the ship had been inspired by the then-current rash of UFO sightings which cluttered up the newspapers. Three models of the ship were built. The two smaller versions measured 2ft and 7ft across





respectively. Far more impressive was the vast 1,000ft mockup built on the 20th Century-Fox backlot. The back of the ship was left open to allow the technicians access to the machinery which operated the ramp and door sections of the saucer.

From here on, with the possible exception of *It Came from Outer Space* (1953), which featured a globular ship of immense diameter, movie spaceships slavishly adhered to either the "rocket" school of design or the "saucer". It wasn't until a lot later, 1968 in fact, that a new type of space film burst upon us and changed space movies forever.

Stanley Kubrick's 2001 *A Space Odyssey* abandoned, once and for all, the rocket ships and saucers of the earlier sf films. The spaceships of 2001 came in all shapes and sizes. Everything from a Pan Am space liner to the vast *Discovery 1* Jupiter probe. But for some reason 2001 didn't spawn a whole series of imitators. In fact the next space film to hit the cinemas was the "real life" drama *Marooned*, which had a bunch of astronauts trapped in a space station in orbit above Earth.

Hammer's *Moon Zero Two* (1969) depicted a future where space travel was as commonplace as air travel is today. The spaceships in the film are vaguely reminiscent of Lunar Excursion Modules used by NASA for the real life moon landings. Perhaps this was an attempt on the part of the producers to convince audiences it was really feasible.

2001's special effects genius Doug Trumbull took up the director's reins on a neat little space movie called *Silent Running*. Assisting him in the special effects department were John Dykstra (better known for his work on *Star Wars* and *Battlestar Galactica*) and Wayne Smith (who helped out on *Buck Rogers*). The *USS Valley Forge* is an impressive space ship, a huge freighter carrying the remains of Earth's flora through the blackness of space. When the order comes for the plants to be ditched, crewman Lowell goes off the deep end and kills his colleagues in an attempt to save the trees.

A lot less serious was the John Carpenter Dan O'Bannon film *Dark Star* (1974). The story concerned the travels of a four man crew aboard the good ship *Dark Star*. Their mission: to

seek out and destroy unstable planets with intelligent thermonuclear bombs, thus making the Universe a safer planet for colonists. Mishap follows mishap, culminating in the jarring of an armed bomb in the bomb bay. The bomb insists that it will explode regardless of its position. The climax of the film is a hysterical cacophony as the various crew-members try various methods of freeing the bomb.

Then in 1977 came the space movie that revolutionised space-craft design, spaceship design and spawned a horde of imitators: George Lucas' *Star Wars*. A new photography process developed by John Dykstra enabled Lucas to stage lavish space battles. The combatants include such craft as "X-Wing Fighters", TIE (Twin Ion Engine) Fighters" and "Stardestroyers". The climax of the movie becomes an aerial firework display of laser blasts and explosions culminating in the spectacular attempts by the rebel heroes to destroy the showpiece of the evil Imperial fleet, the Death Star.

At the same time that Lucas was filming his *Star Wars*, another bright young filmmaker was committing his greatest work to celluloid. Stephen Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* concerned the visit to Earth by a race of superior extraterrestrials and concentrated on the effects the visitation has on the human witnesses. Nevertheless, the sequences depicting the alien spacecraft are nothing short of breathtaking. The special effects were handled by Doug Trumbull, who had worked on *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Silent Running*. As with *Star Wars*, the ships come in various shapes and sizes and the climax features the vast alien Mothership — approximately the size of a mountain-passing over the Wyoming countryside.

Universal's *Battlestar Galactica* was a pointless exercise in cashing in on the trend begun by *Star Wars*. Despite the presence of special effects by *Star Wars*' John Dykstra, the movie/tv series was hampered by mediocre characters and plots. Strangely featured were the battles between the Colonial Viper ships and the Cylon Raiders. Both sides of the dispute used "aircraft carriers" from which to launch their small fighters. With the human colonists it was the title star, the *Battlestar Galactica*, while the Cylons favoured a kind of disc-like Mothership.



Top left: A fighter craft from the tv movie *Battlestar Galactica* (1978). Top right: The Imperial starcruiser that was seen during the opening moments of *Star Wars* (1977), pursuing Princess Leia's ship. Above: A fabulous pre-production painting of the Cylon us from *The Black Hole* (1978). Right: A group of UFOs hover around Devil's Tower in Wyoming in the final climactic sequence of Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1976).



Ridley Scott's *Alien* featured some excellent space ships, designed by Ron Cobb. The space tug *Nostramo* is a sort of refinery, piloted by a crew of seven. When the crew is forced to make planetfall to investigate a mysterious distress call they encounter a strange life-form in the ruins of an alien ship (designed by Swiss surrealist H.R. Giger). The life-form returns to the *Nostramo* with the crew and then begins to metamorphose and wreaks death and destruction within the claustrophobic confines of the spaceship.

Less successful at the box office was the Disney attempt to board the deep space band wagon, *The Black Hole*. The explorer craft *Palomino*, out of Earth, stumbles across the *USS Cygnus* — long presumed lost in space — floating in the eye of a gravitational storm, mere miles from a black hole. Boarding the *Cygnus* the crew of the *Palomino* discover that the captain of the larger ship, Prof Max Reinhart is very much alive and is planning to pilot his ship through the black hole into — he theorises — another universe. The finale of the film shows the *Cygnus* torn apart by the gravitational forces of the black star and the subsequent surreal journey to another universe.

1979 heralded the first new *Star Trek* adventure for ten years. Except that the plot of *Star Trek The Motion Picture* was anything but new to those who had followed the progress of the



Above: One of Ralph McQuarrie's pre-production paintings for *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), the second of the *Star Wars* movies. Below left: The refurbished *USS Enterprise* which appeared in *Star Trek the Motion Picture*. Below right: The space station retreat of Dr Hephæstus (San Jaffe) from *Battle Beyond the Stars* (1980).





original tv show. Drawing heavily on the episodes *The Changeling* and *The Doomsday Machine*, the film lingered too lovingly upon the special effects and not long enough upon the human relationships that made the tv show a success. Nevertheless, the refurbished *Enterprise* was sleeker than the original and the special effects of Douglas Trumbull and John Dykstra were nothing short of spectacular.

Spaceships played a relatively minor part in the recent Stanley Donen film, *Saturn 3*. Though the film featured the inevitable passenger liner thundering overhead in the opening sequence and a survey ship with wings, the ship piloted by the villain was far more interesting. Resembling a giant fly the ship brought the manicol Captain James to the idyllic retreat of Adam (Kirk Douglas) and Alex (Farrah Fawcett).

Roger Corman's *Battle Beyond the Stars* is set firmly in the *Star Wars* mould. Bristling with spaceships and space battles the film has the same light-hearted approach that made *Star Wars* such a success.

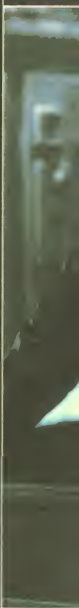
As has always been the case the artists have shown the scientists the way to the stars. Spaceships have become so commonplace to the cinema-going public that when technology finally catches up with the illusions of the movies, somehow it won't be so much of a shock. The filmmakers have been there already.



FANTASY FEMALES

Where would fantasy movies be without the lovely ladies? Chauvinistic or not, the view that beautiful women are an essential ingredient of any fantasy film can hardly be disputed. And to prove our point...

Left: Carrie Fisher appeared in Star Wars as the feisty Princess Leia, and set the style for many science fiction movies that followed.





Above: Ornella Muti as Princess Aura in the recent version of Flash Gordon was the only worthwhile ingredient in an otherwise tedious movie. Below: left: Barbara Bach appeared in the Italian post Star Wars picture The Hammer and has recently returned to the fantasy fold in Caveman. Below: Ex-Charlie's Angel Farrah Fawcett made an appearance in Lord Low Grade's of star vehicle Saturn 3. The costume was cut from the film. Pity!







Opposite: A portrait of Caroline Munro. Above: Caroline as she appeared in the little-seen *Starcrash*, an Italian sf movie directed by Lorenzo Coates (Luigi Cozzilli). Left: A publicity still from *The Spy Who Loved me*. Below: Another portrait from the Bond movie *The Spy Who Loved Me* in which Caroline played a villainous helicopter pilot.

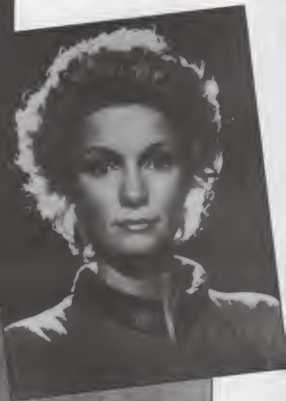






For left: Raquel Welch in the pose that made her world famous, from Hammer's *One Million Years BC*. For left above: Margo Kider as *Sagoromo's* Lala Lala. For left below: Sigourney Weaver as Ripley, the sole survivor of *Alien*. Left above: The stunning Elizabeth Brooks, sultry discovery of *The Howling*. Left below: Indian fashion model turned actress Parvati Khambatta who played Ila in *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*. Above: Melody Anderson appeared in *Flash Gordon* as Dale Arden. ►

Left: The late Dorothy Stratten, ex-Playmate of the Year, as she appeared in her first starring film, *Galunia*. Below: Yvette Mimieux played the female lead in Walt Disney's *The Black Hole*. Bottom: Ex-porn star Sybil Danning lived up an otherwise dull *Battle Beyond the Stars*. Right: The lovely Ornella Muti stole the show from Melody Anderson in *Flash Gordon*.







MONS of the M

Of all the chapters in this book, this is the one we had the most definition problems with. To write about Spaceships in the movies is a simple task. But monsters are far more difficult. What exactly classes as a monster? We have decided to steer clear of vampires, werewolves and the like. They deserve a chapter to themselves, perhaps in next year's annual. Besides, most monsters of that supernatural persuasion have their origins deeply rooted in the human race. That is to say, most vampires, werewolves, mummies and ghouls started out as human beings and were altered by the intervention of Magic or the supernatural. What we are mostly concerned with here are monstrous creatures, born of this planet, which are in no way human.

There is little doubt that the grand-daddy of all monster films is the 1933 version of King Kong. Though many worked on the film, most of the credit must go to Willis O'Brien, without whom the movie would not have been possible. O'Brien had pioneered a method of bringing models to life on film known today as "Stop Motion Animation". The technique had been developed in the early days of film-making by O'Brien and had been successfully employed on several films, such as *The Dinosaur* and *The Missing Link*, *Pets of Our Ancestors* and *The Ghost of*

Slumber Mountain. But it was with the movie version of Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* that O'Brien came into prominence. After the success of *The Lost World*, O'Brien was involved in several films, none of which made it off the drawing board. In the late twenties he was working on the preproduction of *Frankenstein*. The Monster was to be animated via the O'Brien technique. He was also in on the planning stages of a film version of H.G. Wells' *Food of the Gods*. It was while working on another doomed project, *Creation*, for RKO Pictures that Willis O'Brien was brought in on King Kong. Despite differences with the studio over the portrayal of the title star, O'Brien finished the film and King Kong passed into movie history. Just about every "giant creature" film owes a debt of thanks to both King Kong and Willis O'Brien.

To underline the point, O'Brien made a sequel to King Kong and released it later the same year. Son of Kong (1933) is a lot more light-hearted than its predecessor, with the smaller, white ape of Skull Island having far less fearsome features than his dad. In fact, Kong Jr is positive friendly and spends most of the film helping his human chums on their quest to recover the treasure of Skull Island.

All seemed quiet on the monster



STERS MOVIES



front until O'Brien's next ape picture, *Mighty Joe Young* (1949). The film won O'Brien a long-overdue Oscar, though he had much help from a youngster by the name of Ray Harryhausen. Harryhausen, of course, went on to create a whole string of his own movie monsters.

The first of these was the title star of the 1953 movie *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*. Based on the short story by Ray Bradbury, *The Foghorn*, the movie is a mediocre

effort with the exception of the monster scenes by Harryhausen.

Breaking away from the giant creature/stop motion tradition was Jack Arnold's *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954). The Gill-Man was an inhabitant of a lagoon in the heart of the Amazon jungles. In an attempt to prove the existence of a "Missing Link" between land mammals and the creatures of the deep an expedition sets off along the Amazon. After a few underwater battles, the Creature



Top left: *The original King Kong*, as animated by the great Willis O'Brien, who's career was an inspiration to many of today's stop-motion animators. Top right: The robot Kong built by Dino De Laurentiis for his threadbare remake. Left: The original poster artwork for the original King Kong. Above: Yet another great Movie Monster. Jack Arnold's *Creature from the Black Lagoon*.

retires to his cavern home with the leading lady, presumably to set up house. The timely arrival of the hero (Richard Carlson) heralds disaster for the Creature as he finds himself on the wrong of too many rifles and plunges, wounded, into the water to make for the sea. The film did well, prompting a sequel the following year entitled *Revenge of the Creature*. Filmed in 3D like its predecessor, *Revenge* placed the Gill Man against a backdrop of urban Florida, losing much of the

atmosphere of the original in the transition. Universal planned a further sequel, *The Creature Walks Among Us* (1957) but Jack Arnold turned down the opportunity to direct, feeling that he had wrung all the possibilities from the formula.

On a different tack Warner Brothers brought the focus of monster films back to giant creature with the release of their ant picture,

Them (1954). Taking the form of a mystery story for the first couple of reels, *Them* never fails to shock with the first appearance of the giant ants. The military, led by the intrepid hero (James Arness) gas the nest of the giant horrors, but discover to their horror that the queen ant has escaped. They finally track the creatures to the storm drains below Los Angeles and burst in, turning flame throwers on the monsters.

Meanwhile Ray Harryhausen had teamed up with producer Charles Schneer and had released a new film *It Came From Beneath the Sea* (1955). The movie was similar in many ways to the earlier *Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* but substituted a giant octopus (with 6 arms due to budgetary considerations) for the dinosaur. Nevertheless, the picture was superior to the earlier Harryhausen effort and has some really stunning visual effects.

Later the same year, *Creature from the Black Lagoon* director Jack Arnold hit back with his giant insect (oh, all right, arachnid!) movie *Tarantula*. Like *Them*, *Tarantula* used the desert as a backdrop for most of the action and gives audiences a glimpse of a very young Clint Eastwood as one of the jet pilots who napalm the creature into oblivion.



Top: *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* strikes a menacing pose in this publicity still. Above: *The Creature* clammers aboard the expedition ship in search of the current heartthrob, Julie Adams. Right: The poster for the rather bizarre horror film *The Mole People*. Far right: Another poster design for the original *King Kong*.



The following year, 1956, saw the return of Willis O'Brien with a pair of giant creature pictures. The Beast of Hollow Mountain was a badly mutilated version of the original script as presented by O'Brien. The dinosaur of the title appeared in only the closing moments of the film. The Animal World (1956) had dinosaur models created by O'Brien though most of the animation work was handled by Ray Harryhausen. The movie took a documentary approach but wasn't entirely successful and is largely forgotten today.

Firmly in the mould of the old adventure serials of the 1930s was Virgil Vogel's *The Mole People* (1956). A scientific expedition is swallowed up during an earthquake and the members find themselves in an underground city, Sumeria, ruled by a race of albino humans. The servants of the Albinos are the Mole People of the title, a nasty bunch who finally turn on their masters and head for the surface to conquer the world. The remains of the expedition give chase and in another earth tremor emerge into the daylight as the Mole People are buried under tons of rubble.

Even sillier was the Japanese monster movie *Godzilla* (1956). Actually a radioactive dinosaur, *Godzilla* emerges from the sea east





of Japan and proceeds to stamp out Tokyo. For the western audiences additional footage was shot with Raymond Burr under the direction of Terry Morse, which makes the film even more disjointed than it started out. Nevertheless, *Godzilla* proved to be a huge hit with audiences, both in Japan and the West. A veritable deluge of sequels were made, some good (*King Kong vs Godzilla*), some shocking (*Godzilla vs the Smog Monster*).

Willis O'Brien's *The Black Scorpion* (1957) had stunning stop motion effects but little else to recommend it. The plot retreads *Them* (1954) setting the action in Mexico. The Army is called in and most of the deadly arachnids are wiped out. However (you knew there would be a however, didn't you?) one of the nasty things runs away and lives to fight another day. With an Army helicopter. Guess who wins!

The giant insect cycle exhausted itself with a trio of 1957 nasties. *Monster from the Green Hell* (wasps), *The Monster that Challenged the World* (caterpillars) and *The Deadly Mantis* (preying Mantis). All three were low budget, inept attempts to cash in on an already ebbing trend.

Also beginning to show signs of weariness was Willis O'Brien. With his 1959 offering, *The Giant Behemoth*, the pioneer of stop motion had really hit the skids. The

film had a minute budget and is almost unwatchable today. A sad epitaph for the man who created *King Kong*.

It was left to Ray Harryhausen to revitalise the genre of monster films. Most notably with his *Sinbad* series. The *Seventh Voyage of Sinbad* (1958) was (illogically) the first in the series and boasted a giant cyclops, a snake woman, a fire-breathing dragon, a two-headed roc (a kind of giant bird) and a sword-wielding skeleton. The film moves along at a frantic pace, scarcely giving its hero time to draw breath before being confronted by the next menace on his "things to do" list. Harryhausen's effects are superb and, backed up with sensible plot and dialogue, the film is a triumph of fantasy cinema.

Five years passed before Harryhausen's next "monstrous" offering. But *Jason and the Argonauts* was well worth the wait. Jason (Todd Armstrong) and his team of athletes (with the required traitor in their midst) set off to snatch the Golden Fleece. Along the way they have to face up to Talos (a bronze giant), a flock of winged Harpies, a seven-headed Hydra, Neptune the sea god, and a platoon of skeletal warriors. The skeleton fight is perhaps the best special effects sequence of its type ever committed to celluloid. As well as being Harryhausen's personal favourite of all his films, Jason and

the Argonauts was also his most successful.

Harryhausen's next picture was a remake of *One Million BC* (1940) for Hammer Films. Harryhausen's effects were excellent but the script was almost non-existent: literally. No dialogue was spoken for the entire duration of the movie, probably in an attempt at authenticity. However the film does not really come under the heading *Fantasy* and is included only for Harryhausen's involvement.

Two years later in 1968 Harryhausen took one last stab at



prehistoric monsters. Valley of the Gwangi was the realisation of an old Willis O'Brien idea that had languished on the shelf for over twenty five years. Unfortunately, in the final result, the story was not of sufficient quality to support the superlative special effects. Nevertheless the film is under-rated, suffering probably from a comparison with such other Harryhausen efforts as Jason and the Argonauts. In fact the set piece of the cowboys roping the Allosaurus of the title is superbly crafted and ranks among Ray Harryhausen's finest sequences.

Night of the Lepus (1972) is possibly the worst monster movie of all time. No matter how many times I force myself to sit through this turkey, I cannot work up the enthusiasm to be frightened by a bunch of photographically enlarged rabbits! Not even when the filmmakers show them scattering tiny motor cars and other assorted miniature props as they charge through tunnels and across the American countryside. And not even when the sound-man dubs an ominous rumbling onto the soundtrack whenever the bunnies appear. Tch, tch!

Son of Blob (Beware the Blob, 1972) was intentionally dopey so doesn't really count as a rotten movie. That notwithstanding, the film is a dreadful waste of time and effort. The audience's time and the



Opposite top: Japan's favourite monster Godzilla goes fifteen rounds with another monstrous nasty in *Son of Godzilla*. Top: George the Time Traveller (Rod Taylor) puts the future dwelling Morlocks in their place in *The Time Machine*. Left: One of Ray Harryhausen's most fearsome creations, Telos the giant bronze statue from *Jason and the Argonauts*. Above: Janette Scott is introduced to a triffid in the rather weak British version of *Day of the Triffids*.



Top: A rather worse-for-weir praying mantis as it ended up in *The Deadly Mantis*. Centre: Troglodyte and Sabre-tooth square up in *Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger*. Above: James Amess and Joan Weldon mug a giant ant in *Them!* Right: Dave Allen's dinosaur was the centrepiece in *The Crater Lake Monster*.

cast's effort!

After the phenomenal success of *Jason and the Argonauts* it seemed strange that in 1974 Harryhausen and Schneer should turn to Sinbad as the hero for their next mythological extravaganza. But *The Golden Voyage of Sinbad* was a worthy successor to the earlier Sinbad movie. Casting John Phillip Law in the lead role and tv's fourth Doctor Who as the nasty magician Koura, the movie is a spectacular display of fantasy adventure. Notable highspots are the battle between the Griffin and the one-eyed centaur, the excellent clash between Sinbad's men and the six-armed statue of Kali, brought to life by Koura. The superior nature of *The Golden Voyage of Sinbad* must, in part, be attributable to the literate, action-packed script from the tv Avengers producer/scripter Brian Clemens.

Three years later Sinbad was back in *Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger* (1977). The film boasted a Prince who had been turned into a baboon, a giant caveman character called the troglodyte, a sabre toothed tiger and an impressive sequence in which a giant walrus erupts through an ice pack right before the heroes. By far the most effective effect is that of the baboon. The ape is indistinguishable from the real thing but for the fact that the creature is seen playing chess and performing several other intelligent feats. If it weren't for the fact that baboons are famed for their resistance to training, I would be convinced that Harryhausen



pulled a fast one and substituted a real baboon. Eye of the Tiger has come in for criticism from some quarters as being inferior to the other Sinbad movies. However I would disagree. The effects process used in this film were named Dynarama (rather than Harryhausen's usual tag of Dynamation) and were a sort of wide screen version of his stop motion techniques. The final result is a feeling of breath-taking spectacle. Perhaps the creatures are a little more pedestrian than previous Harryhausen monsters but the perception with which they are animated, particularly the baboon and the Troglodyte, is something that other animators would do well to envy.

In recent years, the monster movie has been firmly out of vogue. Movie makers are still cranking out inferior imitations of Lucas' Star Wars films in an effort to hit the jackpot. Only Harryhausen displays any sort of faith in the good, old-fashioned movie monsters. By the time this book is available Harryhausen's latest mythological saga, *Clash of the Titans*, will have been on release for some months. MGM have spent three times the budget that Columbia used to spend on the Sinbad series, though admittedly most of the money went into securing the services of "box-office" stars like Laurence Olivier. But somehow I doubt that the fans will be there to see Olivier. They'll be far more interested in the latest batch of bizarre creatures from the talented hand of Ray Harryhausen.



Top: A beastly beastie from *Worlords of Atlantis*, directed by Kevin Connor. Centre: The heroes of *The Mysterious Island* poke a giant bee with a stick. Above: From the incredibly tacky (it's deliberate. No, really!) *Son of the Blob*. Robert Walker and his friend seem a little perturbed but the lady is tired.



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